

Department of Energy to Seek Public Comment on Management of K Basin Spent Nuclear Fuel

Public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of Spent Nuclear Fuel From the K Basins at the U.S. Department of Energy's Hanford Site will be formally received during a December 12 public hearing at the Red Lion Inn, 2525 N. 20th, Pasco.

The draft EIS addresses environmental impacts of alternatives for managing and storing about 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel for up to 40 years, or until ultimate disposition decisions are made and implemented.

The hearing will be conducted in two sessions beginning at 1:30 p.m. and again at 7:00 p.m.

Members of the public who would like to comment can register in advance by calling (509) 376-7434 prior to 3:00 p.m., December 11. Those who do not pre-register may register to comment at the hearing on a time-available basis.

Written comments, as well as requests for copies of the draft EIS, should be sent to:

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To assure consideration, written comments must be postmarked no later than December 29, 1995.

The spent nuclear fuel, produced mainly by the retired N Reactor, contains about 2,300 tons of uranium, about 6 tons of plutonium and about 1 ton of radioactive fission products. The spent fuel is presently stored in unlined concrete basins at the K East and K West reactors in the 100-K Area of Hanford, a former plutonium production site located in Southeastern Washington State. The basins are approximately 1,400 feet from the Columbia River.

The K East basin contains about 1,300 tons of SNF, stored under water in 3,673 open canisters. About one percent of the fuel has corroded and turned into a sludge containing radionuclides and miscellaneous materials. The sludge is accumulating on the floor of the basin, which has leaked water and radionuclides to the soil beneath it. Recent upgrades have greatly reduced, but not eliminated, the potential for leakage from the K East basin.

About 1,100 tons of the spent fuel are stored under water in the K West basin in 3,817 closed containers. The K West basin is not believed to be leaking.

DOE's preferred alternative is to remove the SNF from the basins, repackage it into fuel baskets designed for multicartridge overpacks and use a conditioning process incorporating heat and vacuum to dry the contents and minimize the potential for further corrosion and the possibility of ignition. The containers holding the dry fuel would be sealed and stored in an interim dry-storage vault to be constructed at the Hanford Site on the 200 Areas plateau. The sludge and water resulting from processing, as well as all residue from the basins, would be removed and transported to appropriate

disposal facilities on the Hanford Site. Other alternatives considered ranged from taking no action to shipping the fuel overseas where it would be processed and returned in a dry form for storage.

Following the end of the comment period on December 29, 1995, all comments received, both written and oral, will be considered in the preparation of the final EIS, which is scheduled to be published in early 1996. The U.S. Department of Energy expects to select the management and storage alternative for implementation and publish a record of decision in the Federal Register 30 days after the publication of the final EIS. # # #

For more information contact:

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DOE Office of External Affairs

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